Career development for doctoral students
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Q: It’s four years until the public defence of my thesis, I have all the time in the world, I only get stressed if I start thinking about “life after the party” already!
A: Fair enough. But do us a favour and at least go in and check out the range on offer. “Finish on Time: Academic productivity and stress management” is a one-day workshop which will already be helpful to you today. It could also be advisable to set up a plan for when you want to do the other activities, not least considering that you will want to show it at your appraisal.

Q: I am a doctoral student on a half-time basis/I am on leave of absence/I am on parental leave/I am studying towards a licentiate degree/I am scholarship-financed – can I still attend?
A: Of course! The only requirement is that you can prove your admission as a doctoral student at LU.

Q: Do I get credits for these activities? Or do they entitle me to an extension?
A: No. No credits and no right to extension. The activities are not part of your research studies programme; they are there to help you in your role as a professional, today and in the future.

Q: But surely my supervisor is responsible for my professional development? And my head of department/assistant head of department? Otherwise, why would both the individual study plan and the appraisals deal with career matters (as well)?
A: It is likely that your supervisor is best placed to know which conferences you should attend and how you should structure your next talk or your seminar. If you are wondering about credit-earning courses, what networks to join, which journals to keep an eye on, then your supervisor certainly would be the one with the answers. But how you become a postdoc at your faculty or what jobs are available “out there” – perhaps not. And do you really ask your supervisor those questions about “what happens next”? Perhaps not. Don’t risk it. It is impossible for these activities to make things less clear to you. And surely you want to be well-prepared for your appraisal with the head of department/assistant head of department and produce a career plan worthy of the title? Of course you do.

Q: I am not sure whether I have the time to attend – it seems as though the workshop I am interested in is right in the middle of a peak in my workload. Should I sign up and hope for the best?
A: Please do not sign up unless you can prioritise the activity when it comes up. Research studies always involve peaks in the workload; to be honest it is unlikely that things will be calmer next time the activity is offered.

But:

Q: If I don’t have time to attend the workshop this semester, have I missed my chance?
A: All activities are recurrent, so if you miss one, you can always put yourself on a waiting list for the next one.

Q: What if I have signed up and it turns out I don’t have time to attend?
A: That is unfortunate, as someone else who really wanted to attend was unable to get a place because you had signed up. Although we do not usually use guilt as a motivating factor, it may well be applicable in this case.

Q: Why are there activities about careerers outside academia? Is this a subtle way of telling me there is no future for me at Lund University?
A: Absolutely not! But once again, this is not about what we want, but what you want. If you see a future at Lund University we will of course be delighted, but before
taking that decision, you must really know what you are getting into and whether or not it is a realistic and desirable path to follow. Attending the seminars about transferable skills will enable you to know what to exclude and why. And what could become relevant a little later on. This is what we mean by taking well-informed decisions.

Q: Why have you chosen to offer these activities specifically – in what way are e.g. external engagement and internationalisation, innovation and open access important for my career as an associate senior lecturer in … or post-doc in the research team …?

A: You will understand when you take part in the activities. We dare to promise you that all these things will be subject to review in your next application for external funding and/or your application for promotion. You will want to know how to approach it and how to write.

Q: Why is everything in English? I don’t think my English is actually good enough. Also, Lund University is a Swedish public authority, whose official language is Swedish, is it not?

A: We think you know the answer, but we’ll spell it out anyway: LU is an international university, in which a large part of the doctoral student population does not have Swedish as a first language. In the unlikely event that you should find it difficult to follow the presentations, ask the person for clarifications in Swedish in one of the question and answer sessions. Or write to the seminar leader afterwards.

Q: This is not part of my research studies programme, as you point out, yet the activities are scheduled during working hours. Why don’t they take place during my leisure time?

A: For Lund University, you are an employee and a human being. If you feel good, if things are going well for you, if we can make career opportunities clearer for you, that is a good thing for your employer as well. We have understood that several doctoral students feel stressed and unsure of their future careers, whether they will complete their studies in time, whether they are good enough for an academic career or for other areas of work, outside academia. Consider how much time and energy is dedicated to this. Not only during leisure time, we imagine. So we make it easier for you to channel a thousand questions and possibly some of your worries, and enable you to take your career into your own hands.

Q: Don’t I need approval from my supervisor or my head of department to attend the courses then?

A: No. But it is probably sensible to inform them of your plans anyway. They may want to advise other doctoral students about the activities available, or follow up on them with you.

Q: I get the impression that my supervisor doesn’t think I should attend these activities, and that my time is needed in the project instead.

A: Could you draw up a plan together with your supervisor for when you could attend the various activities? Perhaps you could still complete the online course in your own time? Furthermore, it leads to a concrete career plan – a good platform!